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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1836
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0321

S E C R E T ATHENS 000698

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/20/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: GREECE SEES USEFUL ROLE IN OPEN CHANNEL
TO HIZBALLAH

REF: A. SECSTTE 52061
[1](#)B. ATHENS 115
[1](#)C. SECSTATE 10263

Classified By: DCM THOMAS COUNTRYMAN. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (S) DCM and DepPolCouns delivered ref A points on supporting the Arab League's efforts in Lebanon to, respectively, Director of the Foreign Minister's Cabinet Kostas Chalastanis and Deputy Head of the MFA's A6 Middle East Directorate Giorgos Ayfantis. On the question of designating Hizballah as a terrorist organization, Chalastanis expressed skepticism about the value of that step, noting the experience of the EU's designation of Hamas, which had caused problems in terms of further political maneuvering and negotiations. DCM pushed back, arguing that Greece's proximity to, and great interest in, the Middle East -- and particularly Lebanon -- gave it special responsibilities in the EU. We thus expected Greece to fulfill its duty and to express serious alarm at Hizballah's attempt to gain political advantage through violence.

[1](#)2. (S) A6's Ayfantis took a similar line to Chalastanis on designating Hizballah. He noted the lack of unanimity on the issue within the EU and argued that Greece had played a "mediating role" since the summer of 2006, which would be eliminated were Greece to designate Hizballah. "We can designate, if you want, but that will shut down our special role." Ayfantis said Greece had urged Hizballah not to use violence against UNIFIL forces, which, if done, would cause an intense reaction. The best policy, Ayfantis argued, was to push Hizballah into the Parliament to give it a stake in the political system.

[1](#)3. (S) At the same time, Ayfantis said we had to make it more difficult for Syria and Iran to supply Hizballah. He said this could be done by boosting the size of the UNIFIL forces. Asked whether Greece was prepared to move beyond its two ships in UNIFIL and offer ground forces, Ayfantis said the UN had asked Greece to supply an air reconnaissance unit. The MFA was favorable to the idea and had recommended it to the Greek MOD, though MinDef Meimarakis was "not warm" to the idea. Ayfantis said further that if French President Sarkozy were to request Greece to send troops -- whether to UNIFIL or to fill an EU peacekeeping role in Gaza (refs B, C) -- Greece would comply. Such a mission would not only be good for Lebanon or Gaza, it would also get the Greek military out of its Aegean-centric mindset -- which Ayfantis said the MFA was advocating -- and could foster cooperation with the Turks, who presumably might also have an interest in sending troops.

SPECKHARD